

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 16445 080822Z
ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-01 ICA-11
SP-02 CG-00 DOTE-00 FMC-01 /038 W
-----110338 080921Z /21

P R 080750Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5964
INFO AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
DIA WASHDC
CINCPAC HONLULU HAWAII
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

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MANILA FOR USCG

EO 11652: NA
TAGS: CGEN, EWWT, TH
SUBJ: APPARENT ATTEMPTED BOARDING OF US VESSELL

1. CAPT OF SEALNAD CONTAINER VESSELL SS PONCE INFORMED CONSUL
JUNE 6 OF FOLLOWING NOTATION BY CHIEF MATE IN SHIP'S LOG
FOLLOWING CONSUL'S QUERY ABOUT REPORT THAT THE VESSELL WAS
BOARDED BY RIVER PIRATES IN THE CHAO PHYA RIVER 10 KMS BELOW
BANGKOK. BEGIN QTE: ABSTRACT OF DECK LOG ENTRY SS PONCE 5
JUNE 78: 1908 WHILE ABEAM OF UNITED FLOUR DOCK DK/MAINT. H.A.
PRUSS CAST OFF A LINE FROM THE STERN, BELONGING TO A RIVER
PIRATE ATTEMPTING TO BOARD. THE RIVER PIRATES RESPONDED
WITH SMALL ARMS FIRE. THE PILOT CALLED FOR POLICE ASSISTANCE.
END QTE

2. CAPT JAMES R SHAW INDICATED THAT HE DID NOT HEAR OR
OBSERVE FIRING OR THE ATTEMPTED BOARDING. HOWEVER, SEQUENCE
OF EVENTS WENT IN THE FOLLOWNG MANNER: THE SHIP ENTERED THE
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PAGE 02 BANGKO 16445 080822Z

CHAO PHYA RIVER AT DUSK, PICKED UP A CUSTOMS OFFICER AND THE
PILOT AND PROCEEDED TOMAKE TH 30 KILOMETER ASCENT OF THE RIVER
TO KONG THOEY PORT AREA OF BANGKOK. THE SHIP CARRIED TWO CON-
TAINERS LOADED WITH 81MM MORTARS, M16 RIFLES, GRENADE LAUNCHERS
AND RAPID FIRE WEAPONS FOR NAVAL LAUNCHES CONSIGNED TO JUSMAG.
CAPT'S VERSION OF WHAT HAPPENED WAS THAT VESSEL WHILESOME 10KMS
SOUTH OF KLONG THOEY JUST AT DUSK IN THE VICINITY OF THE UNITED

FLOUR WHARVES, WAS CHASED BY AN OPEN MOTOR LAUNCH CONTAINING 5 APPARENTLY UNARMED MEN WHICH APPROACHING FROM THE STERN MAN-AGED TO THROW A LING ABOARD WITH A GRAPPLE HOOKING ONTO THE STERN RAIL. HOWEVER, THE STERN WATCH DISENGAGED THE GRAPPLE AND THE BOAT WITHDREW AFTER THE MAN ON WATCH ALSO DROPPED A PIECE OF METAL DEBRIS LYING ON THE DECK INTO THE BOAT FROM THE FANTAIL. THE MAN ON WATCH SAID THERE HAD BEEN SEVERAL OTHER BOATS IN THE VICINITY APPARENTLY IN THE COMPANY OF BOAT WHICH WITHDREW WITH THE THWARTED ASSAILANT. THE PILOT AND CUSTOMS OFFICER OBSERVED NONE OF THE ACTION.

3. CAPT BELIEVES THAT IT MAY HAVE BEEN RIVER PIRATES AIDED AND ABETTED BY CUSTOMS OFFICIALS WHO WERE AWARE OF THE PRESENCE ON BOARD OF WEAPONS. ANOTHER POSSIBLE EXPLANATION IS THAT A SMALL CRAFT SIMPLY WAS HOOKING A RIDE UP TO BANGKOK.

4. THIS LATTER POSSIBILITY IS DISCOUNTED BY THE LOCAL SEALAND REP WHO SAID THAT THERE WAS AT LEAST ONE SIMILAR INCIDENT A YEAR AGO WHEN BOARDERS, IN THE SAME AREA OF THE RIVER, SUCCESSFULLY MADE IT ABOARD AND OPENED CONTAINERS AND WERE CAUGHT THROWING 10 CARTONS OF BICYCLES AND HAIR DRYERS OVER BOARD TO TRAILING LONG TAILED BOATS. THE BOARDERS JUMPED OVER BOARD AND WERE NOT APPREHENDED. THE SEALAND AGENT NOTED THAT A NUMBER OF AGENCIES WERE AWARE OF THE DELIVERY OF THE WEAPONS IN ADVANCE, INCLUDING THE PORT AUTHORITY, CUSTOMS, SEALAND AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 BANGKO 16445 080822Z

JUSMAG.

5. SEALAND NOW HAS A STANDARD REQUIREMENT FOR MAINTAINING A WATCH AROUND THEIR SHIPS PARTICULARLY DURING THE HOURS OF DARKNESS WHILE MOVING UP THE RIVER. WHILE IN PORT, LIGHTS AND SECURITY GUARDS ARE MAINTAINED TO PROTECT THE CONTAINERS. FOLLOWING THIS INCIDENT SEALAND THAILAND HAS RECOMMENDED TO THE COMPANY THAT IN THE FUTURE ALL ARMS SHIPMENTS BE KEPT UNDER DECK.

6. PONCE DEPARTED BANGKOK FOR HONG KONG JUNE 6.

7. COMMENT: THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THIS INCIDENT ARE ADMITTEDLY UNCLEAR. THERE IS NO CONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE THAT THE SHIP WAS ACTUALLY IN THE PROCESS OF BEING BOARDED OR THE WEAPONS ON BOARD WERE THE TARGET. EMBASSY OFFS DID NOT HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO QUESTION SEAMAN PRUSS WHO IS THE ONLY AVAILABLE WITNESS. HONG KONG MAY WISH TO DO SO WHEN THE PONCE ARRIVES. UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, THE DEPT MAY ALSO WISH PUBLISH A NOTICE TO MARINERS. END COMMENT.
WHITEHOUSE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: SHIP HARASSMENT, PONCE SS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 08 jun 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978BANGKO16445
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780239-0507
Format: TEL
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780683/aaaactkp.tel
Line Count: 115
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: da3d408f-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2444678
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: APPARENT ATTEMPTED BOARDING OF US VESSELL
TAGS: CGEN, EWWT, TH, SEALAND LINES
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/da3d408f-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014